

Tim Porter / PHOTOGRAPHS

The problem was that you didn't always know what you were seeing until later, maybe years later, that a lot of it never made it in at all, it just stayed stored there in your eyes.

— MICHAEL HERR, *Dispatches* (Knopf)



For the past six months, Tim Porter has been active photographing two seemingly disparate subjects: *The Nitobe Gardens*, and *Isy's Theatre Cabaret*.

The Japanese gardens (2.2 acres) was made at UBC in 1960 by a distinguished group of Japanese landscape architects directed by Kannosuke Mori. The careful placement of trees, shrubs and stone arrangements gives an oriental focus to our scenery, and seventeen years of weathering and growth have enhanced that focus.

Isy's is a focus of another kind. It opened in 1957 as one of Vancouver's finest entertainment spots, part of an international circuit of nightclubs. By 1971 these clubs had collapsed under the weight of television, and today *Isy's* is a strip city — a reminder of the past glamour of metropolitan nightlife.

At first, Porter's interests appear arbitrary. Closer examination reveals that there is a thematic unity, which appears to have emerged intuitively rather than from deliberation. *The Nitobe Gardens* is a microcosm: nature moulded through the mind. Similarly the vicarious sexual innuendo of *Isy's Cabaret* reflects the suppressed sexuality of our society.

Porter does not restrict himself to representation, but interprets the subject matter through his photographic vision. He spent months familiarizing himself *in situ*, allowing each of the images to emerge and distill.

As he came to know the people and stories of the club, the camera became part of the dancer's performance, with photographs taken as fast as the tempo and the ambience. Yet Porter remains ironically aware of Vancouver's second-rate approximation of the energy and excitement of Las Vegas nightlife. He recognizes the dreams and the aspirations, and his presence serves to partially recreate some of the glamour of a first-class Vegas revue.

His interest in the Japanese garden may seem more obscure. Foremost it derives from Japan itself, where visual aesthetics are advanced, especially regarding the contemporary notion of the photographic essay, which develops a personal visual syntax through editing. Porter respects the important Japanese photographers, who publish their photographic projects extensively in journals rather than being concerned with the photograph as an art object. And there is also the Japanese vision of nature which is so at odds with our own chaotically organic West Coast rain forests. Man's hand on nature is ever present and that degree of control and artifice has been a central theme in Japanese photography.

Just as human control in the Japanese garden hints at repression and subverted violence, the innuendo of movements and gestures of the strippers similarly illustrates the repressed and subverted sexuality in our own society. The vicarious, voyeuristic pleasure one gets from watching the strippers ultimately remains unfulfilled, and distinctly at odds with the real feelings of the strippers.

These photographs offer an alternative to the voyeuristic experience or the environment of the gardens. We are detached from the image and its content, and Porter makes strong demands on his viewers. He has sacrificed photographic conventions and techniques, for the sake of the final effect. The camera is jimmied, lights are moved and focus is changed during the exposure, with results that are luminous, lyrical, evocative. Although each photograph retains an initial feeling of familiarity, the juxtaposition of the images creates a new visual syntax which transcends the subject matter.

— DAVID MAC WILLIAM



















